THE CHARITY OF CHARLES DICKENS

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THE CHARITY
OF
CHARLES DICKENS
HIS
INTEREST IN THE HOME FOR FALLEN WOMEN
AND
A HISTORY OF THE STRANGE CASE OF
CAROLINE MAYNARD THOMPSON

BY
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PREFATORY

There is an almost unknown episode in the life of Charles Dickens which illustrates and emphasizes his charity and his untiring efforts to help the unfortunate. It had to do with the founding of a Home for Fallen Women — a project launched by his friend, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, with his enthusiastic support.

It is but natural that the somewhat ponderous and puritanical Forster should purposely ignore the fact of his friend's connection with Miss Coutts' Home, especially as the scheme ultimately failed; but to the Dickens student who eagerly seeks for every scrap of information concerning him, the account of his participation in this and other philanthropic work will be of absorbing interest.

For years collectors have searched in vain for the pamphlet he wrote containing an appeal to unfortunate girls. A notable Dickens authority, Mr. J. W. T. Ley, in his recent annotated edition of Forster's life of Dickens, doubted if there was one in existence. However, in the summer of 1928 Mr. Charles E. Goodspeed of

Boston, purchased one in London from a gentleman, the last private secretary employed by Miss Burdett-Coutts. Accompanying this were some highly important autograph letters by Dickens. These items were purchased from Mr. Goodspeed by The Bibliophile Society, and are contained in this book. The letters revealed evidence of a specific case showing Dickens's personal interest in the work of helping wayward girls, and were at once found to be of great importance to Dickens students.

The task of completing the case by adding corroborative detail from other sources had been begun when word was received that Mr. Oliver R. Barrett of Chicago, a well known collector and a member of The Bibliophile Society, had purchased several important Dickens letters from the Baroness Burdett-Coutts collection, all connected with this episode. Though vague and somewhat mystifying by themselves, when joined to the letters and other material purchased by The Bibliophile Society, they rounded out a remarkably absorbing fact story of Dickens's effort to rescue a young woman from the fate of a common prostitute. In completing the narrative we are therefore much indebted to Mr. Barrett's generosity.

This contribution to the new material that is gradually coming to light regarding Charles Dickens shows how tenaciously he supported any cause that won his interest. It shows also that his friends often doubted his impulsive judgments, which frequently emanated from his heart rather than his head. But most of all it proves again his humanity, his understanding, his intuition and his gift of discovering gold even in the gutter.

Although the last letter in this human story leaves the ultimate destiny of the girl somewhat obscure, who can doubt that if the noble patroness he appealed to failed with future aid, Dickens himself saw to it that the brand he had snatched from the flames was not thrown back to destruction.

The gratitude of all true Dickens lovers is due to those who preserved these valuable items of evidence, which disclose those hidden traits of true nobility in the author who not only created immortal characters in stories but practiced in every day life the principles he advocated in his books.

EDWARD F. PAYNE

THE CHARITY OF CHARLES DICKENS

GIRLS OF THE STREETS

Charles Dickens, from the earliest days of his writing career, was in sympathy with the poor, the unfortunate, the wayward and the fallen. The derelict always appealed to him in his continual search for the drama of life.

And in the long roster of humanity that he studied and portrayed, none touched his heart more keenly than the girls of the streets — those young unfortunates, who daring society to its face, openly elect to live by the oldest profession known to women.

They have been called the "frail sisterhood," but they are far from that. Sheltered women would find it hard indeed to take to the highways and exist by offering themselves to the casual passerby. And it is no wonder that men, leaving aside all carnal desire, often find in such girls something to admire. Their reckless defiance of law and order, their contempt for the world's opinion, their picturesque language, their cheerfulness under adversity, excite sympathy rather than lust in the minds of normal men.

The pampered "mistress," the proverbial "other woman," and such females do not belong to this class. Theirs is a bed of roses compared to the life of the sturdy young prostitute who haunts the streets with a bravery and determination born of dire necessity.

Suffering the contempt of the more hardened male citizen, the laughing stock of the cruel and stupid of mankind, beneath the notice of her own sex, at war with society in general, totally unprotected, the prey of thieves and swindlers who never hesitate to cheat or to rob her of her wretched price, this is all in the life of the girl of the streets.

Generally speaking the calling is now said to be less profitable than of old, largely due to the ruinous competition of so-called polite society.

The emancipation of woman, her greater freedom, the pace of the "younger set," the single standard of morality for the sexes so often recognized and practiced in the business world, the accepted fact that self-supporting woman can do quite as she pleases in the present age by exercising even a modicum of caution, have all tended to minimize the vocation of the professional prostitute. Scanty raiment, the accepted mode of today, is such as she would

have worn only in the dim parlors of the bagnio. Her paint and powder have been appropriated; her cigarette, once the very badge of her infamy, has become a nail in the structure of social life, and if she ever drank as much as some of the "flappers" of today, her patrons would either have left her in disgust or stolen her clothes. In short, her "atmosphere" has been filched from her, and "necking" debutantes having all her accomplishments save one, freely offer what she, poor soul, must sell in order to exist.

Cleopatra, Thais, Pompadour, Camille and others still weave a potent spell in the imaginations of both men and women, and many "modern" pens have created a literature of sexual sufferance and glorified immorality that was totally unimagined in the English literature of Dickens's day.

We may wonder, if he were of this present age, how his genius would grasp the subjects now so popular. He wrote to please the public, that it might buy his books in enormous quantities; would he have catered to the popular demand in giving us vivid, highly wrought pictures of modern life? Would he have made "Dora" a gin-drinking flapper, who "pulled

the wool" over her pompous papa's eyes and stayed ostensibly all night with Julia Mills, but really danced and drank all night with David Copperfield? And where would the tragedy of Little Emily fit in with the present day standards? Steerforth might not have "brought her back a lady," but she would have made one of herself without much trouble, and her tragic flight would have been but a bit of education in the manners of the upper classes.

We occasionally read the sweet old Victorian stories, with their morals and their melodrama, but the world of today looks on them as fairy tales, suited only for the very young.

Charles Dickens grew up in the field of grim experience and rubbed elbows with the worst side of life. In those days when as a lawyer's clerk he went with his friend Potter and paid a few pence to play in the minor theatres, the female parts were usually taken by stage-struck strumpets, or at least by those far below the social strata that even he at that time enjoyed.

As he walked to and from his wretched lodgings and the boot-blacking factory, as a little boy, he daily passed the girls of the street and knew, all too early in life, their sordid stories. Later on there is no supposition that he was any

different from other young men who receive their early education in matters of sex from those best qualified to teach; but through all the experiences he may have had, there persisted a sympathy and understanding, a love and charity for all unfortunates of society, that has made every touch of his pen precious to untold millions.

After he became famous, many a desperate girl must have accosted him in his midnight rambles among the old haunts of London and received a kind word, a cheery laugh, and enough money for a night's lodging.

When he began to write his "Sketches by Boz," those little stories of London streets, one of the most dramatic was a picture of the arrest of two of these young street-walkers, because it was written with full knowledge of the life, and a deep sympathy for its subjects. He was twenty-three or four years of age when he wrote his sketch entitled —

THE PRISONERS' VAN

We were passing the corner of Bow-street, on our return from a lounging excursion the other afternoon, when a crowd, assembled around the door of the Police Office, attracted

our attention and we turned up the street accordingly. There were thirty or forty people standing on the pavement and half across the road, and a few stragglers were patiently stationed on the opposite side of the way — all were evidently waiting in expectation of some arrival. We waited too, a few minutes, but nothing occurred; so we turned round to an unshaved sallow-looking cobbler, who was standing next us with his hands under the bib of his apron, and put the usual question of "What's the matter?" The cobbler eyed us from head to foot with superlative contempt, and laconically replied "Nuffin."

Now, we were perfectly aware that if two men stop in the street to look at any given object, or even to gaze in the air, two hundred men will be assembled in no time: but we knew very well that no crowd of people could by possibility remain in a street for five minutes without getting up a little amusement among themselves, unless they had some absorbing object in view. The natural inquiry next in order was, "What are all these people waiting here for?"

"Her Majesty's carriage," replied the cobbler. This was still more extraordinary. We could not imagine what earthly business Her

Majesty's carriage could have at the Public Office, Bow-street, and we were beginning to ruminate upon the possible causes of such an uncommon appearance, when a general exclamation from all the boys in the crowd of "Here's the van!" caused us to raise our heads and look up the street.

The covered vehicle, in which prisoners are conveyed from the police offices to the different prisons, was coming along at full speed and it then occurred to us for the first time that Her Majesty's carriage was merely another name for the prisoners' van, conferred upon it, not only by reason of the superior gentility of the term, but because the aforesaid van is maintained at Her Majesty's expense, having been originally started for the exclusive accommodation of ladies and gentlemen under the necessity of visiting the various houses of call known by general denomination of Her Majesty's Gaols.

The van drew up at the office-door, and the people thronged round the steps, just leaving a little alley for the prisoners to pass through. Our friend the cobbler and the other stragglers crossed over, as we followed their example. The driver, and another man who had been seated by his side in front of the vehicle, dismounted,

and were admitted into the office. The office-door was closed after them, and the crowd were on the tiptoe of expectation.

After a few minutes' delay the door again opened, and the two first prisoners appeared. They were a couple of girls, of whom the elder could not be more than sixteen, and the younger of whom had certainly not attained her fourteenth year. That they were sisters was evident from the resemblance which still subsisted between them, though two additional years of depravity had fixed their brand upon the elder girl's features as legibly as if a red-hot iron had seared them. They were both gaudily dressed, the younger one especially, and although there was a strong similarity between them in both respects, which was rendered the more obvious by their being handcuffed together, it is impossible to conceive a greater contrast than the demeanour of the two presented. The younger girl was weeping bitterly — not for display or in the hope of producing effect, but for very shame; her face was buried in her handkerchief, and her whole manner was but too expressive of bitter and unavailing sorrow.

"How long are you for, Emily?" screamed a red-faced woman in the crowd.

"Six weeks and labour," replied the elder girl with a flaunting laugh; "and that's better than the stone jug anyhow; the mill's a deal better than the Sessions, and here's Bella a-going too for the first time. Hold up your head, you chicken," she continued boisterously, tearing the other girl's handkerchief away; "Hold up your head, and show 'em your face, I an't jealous, but I'm blessed if I an't game."

"That's right old gal," exclaimed a man in a paper cap, who, in common with the greater part of the crowd, had been inexpressibly delighted with this little incident. "Right!" replied the girl; "ah, to be sure; what's the odds, eh?" —

"Come, in with you," interrupted the driver.

"Don't you be in a hurry, coachman," replied the girl, "and recollect I want to be set down in Cold-bath Fields — large house with a high garden-wall in front; you can't mistake it. Hallo, Bella, where are you going to — you'll pull my precious arm off!"

This was addressed to the younger girl, who, in her anxiety to hide herself in the caravan, had ascended the step first, and forgotten the strain upon the handcuff.

"Come down, and let's show you the way."

And after jerking the miserable girl down with a force which made her stagger on the pavement, she got into the vehicle, and was followed by her wretched companion.

These two girls had been thrown upon London streets, their vices and debauchery, by a sordid and rapacious mother. What the younger girl was then, the elder had been once; and what the elder then was, she must soon become. A melancholy prospect, but how surely to be realized: a tragic drama, but how often acted! Turn to the prisons and police offices of London — nay, look into the very streets themselves. These things pass before our eyes day after day, and hour after hour they have become such matters of course, that they are utterly disregarded. The progress of these girls in crime will be as rapid as the flight of a pestilence, resembling it too in its baneful influence and wide-spreading infection. Step by step how many wretched females, within the sphere of every man's observation have become involved in a career of vice frightful to contemplate; hopeless at its commencement, loathsome and repulsive in its course, friendless, forlorn, and unpitied, at its miserable conclusion!

There were other prisoners — boys of ten, as

hardened in vice as men of fifty — a houseless vagrant going joyfully to prison as a place of food and shelter, handcuffed to a man whose prospects were ruined, character lost, and family rendered destitute by his first offence. Our curiosity, however, was satisfied. The first group had left an impression on our mind we would gladly have avoided, and would willingly have effaced.

The crowd dispersed; the vehicle rolled away with its load of guilt and misfortune, and we saw no more of the Prisoners' Van.

Thus did Charles Dickens begin to study the girl of the streets when he was very young, and this interest never abated. When in later years he created Nancy Sikes in *Oliver Twist* he wrote the following in the preface to the story, because someone had criticised him for portraying such a character. —

"It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. *It is true.* Every man who has watched these melancholy shades of life knows it to be so. Suggested to my mind long ago, by what I often saw and read of in actual life around me,

I have tracked it through many profligate and noisome ways, and found it still the same. From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her bloody head upon the robber's breast, there is not one word exaggerated or overwrought. It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth He leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering behind; the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the dried-up, weed-choked well. It involves the best and worst shades of our common nature; much of its ugliest hues, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility, but it is a truth. I am glad to have it doubted, for in that circumstance I find a sufficient assurance that it needed to be told."

BARONESS BURDETT-COUTTS

In 1841, just previous to his first American visit, Dickens became acquainted with a very wealthy, noble and charitable lady in the person of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, who in common with so many of his women friends was an ardent admirer of his work, as also of himself. Throughout her days her charities were notable, and when her long useful life came to a close she was deemed worthy of a final resting place in Westminster Abbey, close to the friend to whom she was so kind and who aided her, through many years, in her labors to make the world a better place for the victims of poverty and misfortune.

When Dickens was thirty years of age and living in a blaze of glory — for his reputation was made almost as soon as he began to write — there existed an unbridged gulf between the rich and the poor; a yawning chasm that we of this age can hardly comprehend. The rich were very rich and the poor endured a poverty past belief. Nor did the rich concern themselves very much about the poor.

Dickens, a remarkable combination of all sorts of genius, in search of subjects, saw that if he wrote of the poor who had been neglected in literature as well as in life, he would be telling the rich — such as might be charitably inclined — something they did not know, and would at the same time win the love of the poor and the lower middle class. Like all writers he wished to be read, and to make money, but in electing to picture the poor and try to improve their condition he also chose a subject nearest his heart; one on which, in the light of his own experiences he could give his marvellous talents full play.

So a group of characters appeared in his books early in his career — little Oliver, Smike, Nancy and many more, pathetic in their poverty, oppressed and abused, fit objects indeed for charity.

Miss Angela Burdett-Coutts, daughter of Sir Francis Burdett, was one of the few charitably inclined rich; she was deeply impressed by Dickens's *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and their faithful presentation of that new and novel subject, the deserving poor. There is little doubt that she made the acquaintance of Dickens so that she

might better understand how to bestow her charity; and a memorable friendship was begun when these two characters met. What a company of unfortunates had reason to bless that meeting!

She was one of the first of the very rich to recognize Dickens's pioneer work in this vast field of endeavor in behalf of the down-trodden; and she was to be one of the first to bridge the chasm that separated the rich from the poor.—With such a heart as she possessed it is no wonder that Dickens and she felt a mutual attraction. Little is known of their friendship outside of her charities, which he helped to manage for her; but her confidence in him must have been supreme, for it is a well known fact that a large part of the money she gave so generously went through Dickens's hand and was bestowed as he recommended.

Possibly some modern novelist may some day find something sensational concerning this close friendship, but the fact will always remain simply this: that here was the writer, the foremost humanitarian of his time, and the "Lady Bountiful" whose purse-strings he untied with his pen, and together they greatly improved the condition of the poor.

It has been said of Dickens, that "he softened the hearts of a whole generation; he made charity fashionable." There is more than a modicum of truth in this. In 1855, twenty years after he began to espouse the cause of the poor, there were five hundred and thirty charitable societies in London alone, dispensing no less than seventeen million dollars annually.

The dwellers or visitors in a great city today have little conception of the abject poverty and awful surroundings of the London poor of a hundred years ago. Mr. Arthur L. Hayward in his book *The Days of Dickens* gives the reader a graphic account of the poverty-stricken sections of London, of its lack of proper water supply, its incomplete drainage with its "Stinking river and festering slums." Words can scarcely convey the truth of the horrible conditions then existing. Often in one tumble-down, rat infested, disease laden house, there were crowded several families, the strong and weak, the sick and well, all living together, destitute of air, light, water, and drainage, entering this life and leaving it, all under the worst possible conditions that human beings could know.

Thousands of houses stood over cesspools,

the breeding places of disease and death, and thousands of the very poor lived in cellars so close to these pools that they could not escape contamination.

All sorts of noisome slums abounded, many of them connected by secret passages through which criminals might escape or hide from the law. In all this filth and wretchedness there lived and struggled for existence a multitude of wretches of whom many were little children who from their earliest years were put to work to support not only themselves but their dissolute parents.

From these sinks of iniquity, profligate drunken mothers sent their little daughters out onto the street as soon as they were old enough to appeal to the lecherous ruffians who thronged the crooked crime-laden ways of the city. The brain revolts at the contemplation of these young lives debauched for paltry sums that were turned over to unnatural parents.

Scarcely less fortunate than the miserable young prostitutes were the boys, practically sold to cruel masters who forced them to become chimney sweeps at the early age of five or six, subjecting them to inhuman treatment, and driving them into tortuous twisted chimneys

where they frequently perished at their suffocating labor.

Young children worked fifteen hours a day in factories and mines or wherever their little hands and bodies could be used. As they grew older and sought to learn a trade, we find that seamstresses, for instance, often worked twenty hours or more at a stretch. Is it strange then, that each year many took the "easiest way" and offered their bodies to the passerby?

In *Oliver Twist*, in *Bleak House*, also in the *Sketches*, Dickens painted again and again the horrors of the slums, and it was but natural that when the Baroness Burdett-Coutts sought to do something to ameliorate the condition of the poor in London, no one could tell her better where to begin than her young friend Dickens.

Under his guidance she visited the worst point of all, a section called Nova Scotia Gardens, Bethnal Green, and after acquainting herself with the conditions here she bought the property, had the houses entirely demolished, and erected on the site what were called the Columbia Square Buildings, the first model dwellings for the poor in London.

When she became interested in the "Ragged Schools" of London, it was Dickens who ad-

vised and assisted her in bestowing her money in the most efficient manner and pointed out weaknesses in this system of education which she corrected to the benefit of many poor children.

Mr. Charles C. Osborne, writing in the "Dickensian," tells how the Baroness Burdett-Coutts gave Dickens the idea of Mrs. Gamp. He had just returned from his first American visit and had written *American Notes*, which so aroused our citizens, and was busy on *Martin Chuzzlewit* in the autumn of 1842.

The first of the shilling numbers in which it was issued came out in January 1843, and he had written a fourth of the story before he introduced Mrs. Gamp. In the summer of 1843 he took a cottage in the country, at Finchley and it was in this locality that the baroness in discussing his work, told him certain stories about a strange sort of nurse she had employed for a short period.

In her youth, Miss Coutts had a favorite governess, Miss Hannah Meredith, who in later years she elevated to the position of companion. In the winter of 1842-3 Miss Meredith was taken ill, and an odd being who passed as a nurse and who it is said was a fair example

of the sick room attendants of that day, was engaged. Her peculiarities were tolerated for a short time, when she was discharged and a successor engaged; but in the mean time the baroness, who had great powers of observation and descriptive abilities, had obtained such a mental image of the peculiar person that she was able to give Dickens a most life-like imitation and description of her. Miss Meredith added her own recollections, and out of it all, Dickens finally drew the famous character of Mrs. Gamp, with her companions Betsey Prig and the mysterious Mrs. Harris.

Once he had secured the full inspiration, with his usual impetuosity he set to work improving and enriching her highly entertaining dialect and inventing situations for her in his story as it unfolded, blowing the magic breath of his genius into her ample bosom until she lived, and thus began the existence of a character that will last as long as the English language.

Dickens wrote to his friend Forster: "Tell me what you think of Mrs. Gamp! . . . I want your opinion at once. I think you know something of mine. I mean to make a mark with her." And he did. Her appearance in *Martin Chuzzlewit* added greatly to the fame and for-

tunes of that story which, when it appeared in book form, bore these words: —

"To Miss Burdett-Coutts this Tale is Dedicated, with the True and Earnest Regard of the Author."

Although he had received a letter from the baroness while on his American visit in 1842, this was undoubtedly about the beginning of the warm friendship between them. Her regard for him was frank, open and enthusiastic. She offered to educate his eldest son, Charles, Jr. Although Dickens had no need of financial assistance, the offer was accepted, and the boy was educated at King's College. Later on, Walter Savage Landor Dickens, another son, was commissioned a cadet in the 26th Indian Infantry Regiment through her generous influence.

A REFUGE FOR THE FALLEN

There came a time when the baroness, looking from her windows at No. 1 Stratton Street, saw young girls — like Emily and Bella in "The Prisoners' Van" and Nancy Sikes in *Oliver Twist*, — pass to and fro under the flickering gas lights pursuing their sordid search along the unsympathetic street. She saw little Bella, perhaps sixteen years of age, in her tawdry finery accost a man only to be repulsed with a curse or a blow, saw a burly "bobby" overtake her on her miserable journey, saw her arrested and dragged away to the police station. And after Bella came others, a sad procession, always the same; and as she turned from these dismal sights to her own beautiful home with its hospitable lights, its cheery warmth — and perhaps as she took up *Oliver Twist* and read again of Nancy — she realized with an overwhelming sense of responsibility that here was a charity that might well enlist her sympathies and her fortune. She therefore decided to found a home for fallen women.

She had sensed a problem that had waited

through the ages for a solution — and still waits unsolved. The Burdett-Coutts millions, with Dickens's devoted aid, were to try to solve it in the years to come, but that effort too was destined only to prove the monumental nature of the task.

It was not altogether a new idea; other homes and refuges had been started and had as often failed because of their inability to reach the hearts and needs of the girls they sought to benefit. To offer anything in the way of an attractive life that would take the place of their miserable existence — which had its lure and excitements for young and reckless girls — was indeed a problem.

Much good was being done by a "Midnight Meeting" movement at which tea and toast were served free, and where the girls congregated to be addressed by the Reverend Baptist Noel, a speaker of great force and persuasion. The accompanying quaint old wood cut shows a well attended meeting with the worthy reformer holding forth, while Bella, Caroline, Flora and many others are evidently impressed, in a most repentant mood. An artist of the period has sketched with truthful touch the garb of these wayward sisters of 1853.

What would have been the good preacher's reaction if one of our present day flappers had walked into his meeting, clad in the dress of 1929? Of course she would have been instantly arrested and taken to the police station. The young woman in the foreground and the one in the middle distance are unconsciously exposing what was in that far off day, a shocking display of *ankle*.

Miss Burdett-Coutts naturally turned to Dickens for his advice and assistance, which however she did not always follow, having other advisers, as well as a rather determined will of her own. But no one could have been better fitted to aid her than he, for in addition to his intense interest in the subject he had, through his work in prison reform, got to know a number of prominent officials, including Mr. Chesterton, head of the Middlesex House of Correction, and Lieutenant Tracey, Governor of Cold Bath Fields Prison, Bridewell.

Both of these men had become known for their humane methods in the conduct and care of prisons and criminals, and both were well versed in the ways and weaknesses of these girls of the streets who were continually being sent to their institutions for short terms. Nat-

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.—REV. BAPTIST NOEL SPEAKING.

urally they knew many who were possessed of good qualities and were worthy of any help that Miss Coutts's proposed Home could bestow.

Regarding a suitable building for the experiment, Dickens convinced Miss Coutts that it was not necessary to build a new one, and after a long search he found a large house and grounds in Shepherd's Bush, then a suburb of London, at that time quite out in the country. This was purchased and remodelled to fit the needs of the proposed institution.

While this work was in progress he investigated previous efforts in both England and France. He visited many homes of the kind in Paris. He also consulted members of the British Government to see if their help could be obtained in securing places for the reformed girls in distant parts of the Empire, where they might start life anew with the hope of marriage.

Dickens, far more than the noble patroness or her other advisers, knew the nature of the girl of the streets. Observation had taught him that unless new and absorbing interests were supplied, these weak characters would soon relapse into their former life. He knew that in most of her moments the "street-walker" con-

sidered herself quite a person, and that her life even with its disgrace and misery was far more free from drudgery than some of her more respectable married sisters.

He also doubted the advisability of excessive religious influence. Miss Burdett-Coutts held to the opinion that applicants to the Home should be interviewed by the Chaplain. To this Dickens did not agree, — feeling it would have the effect of discouraging many from even beginning the work of reformation. He knew to what an insupportable extent religion was dinned into the ears of the inmates in most institutions, and that the girls shrank with real fear from all that sort of thing. The "holier than thou" atmosphere would always be too much for them to endure, and a clergyman taking them to task for their sins could not fail to arouse their resentment.

It was a monumental undertaking to reform such characters. They distrusted women, and as for men, they well knew that for every one who was honestly trying to raise them up, there were a hundred willing to drag them down.

The Home was ready for occupancy in November 1847, and a name was chosen. Dickens wanted to call it simply "The Home," but some

of Miss Coutts' other advisers named it "Urania College," and this ridiculous title was adopted. The word "College" was misleading enough, but "Urania," the goddess of the Heavens, must have puzzled many a young prostitute when she attempted to figure out her connection with that deity.

Dickens proposed the first set of rules and regulations, by which any truly penitent woman was eligible for admission. New-comers, without exception, were to be treated as probationers and kept for a time in a separate part of the building. When they had shown by good conduct that their desire to lead a new life was sincere, they were to be admitted into the "College." A system of marks was to be employed, a certain number given for each day's good conduct and work, and a certain number deducted for misbehavior. Although he proposed this mark system through the college itself, his plan was not adopted. Miss Coutts saw only its defects, not its advantages.

Just how this excellent lady retained Dickens's interest in her work after vetoing so many of his ideas, is hard to understand. He was decidedly imperious himself and was accustomed to having his own way. That he accepted all

this opposition to his plans and suggestions must have been due only to one reason—he was thoroughly interested in the undertaking.

Everything being finally arranged, the Home opened with inmates recommended for admission by Mr. Chesterton and Lieutenant Tracey, and carefully investigated by Dickens himself, who talked with each girl and studied her disposition and nature so that he was able to give the Matron much useful information, and if necessary exercise a personal influence. Each one of these girls had a dramatic story, and one can imagine how much more readily they responded to his sympathetic interest than they would to the routine catechisms of the usual Chaplain.

And here, of course, is the high spot in the whole scheme: Other "Homes" for erring females had been established, other places of refuge for the "frail sisterhood" had come and gone, but none had enjoyed the distinction of issuing an invitation to be rescued, penned by the most famous writer in England.

We can understand with what enthusiasm Dickens set himself to the task of writing this appeal that was to touch the hearts of these poor hunted transgressors. It was a letter that

would be read by Miss Coutts and her rich friends, also by Lieutenant Tracey and Mr. Chesterton before being given out. To accomplish its purpose it must at once encourage the girls to reform and enter Urania College. It must fill them with a feeling of revulsion at their sinful existence, and at the same time inspire them with a terror of the future, if they refused to accept this easy method of salvation.

Here was a wonderful opportunity, and of course Dickens's skillful pen rose to it grandly. As a bit of advertising writing the appeal was a masterpiece. Dickens was offering salvation to a class that did not want it; whose "sales resistance" was as strong as any copy writer ever faced. So he used all his genius, all his arts of persuasion in writing this prospectus for Urania College.

Advertising experts say there is a psychological time to present a proposition. Dickens knowing this, put this pamphlet in the hands of the unfortunate girl just when she was at the lowest ebb; when she had been thrown into prison and was filled with despair. Alone in a gloomy cell with nothing to read, she had this circular given her. If she had any desire to escape from the dreary round of prostitution,

arrest and imprisonment, here was the one chance. His appeal — one of the rarest Dickens items in existence, which up to this time has eluded all publishers and all bibliographers — ran as follows: —

"You will see, on beginning to read this letter, that it is not addressed to you by name. But I address it to a woman — a very young woman still — who was born to be happy, and has lived miserably; who has no prospect before her but sorrow, or behind her but a wasted youth; who, if she has ever been a mother, has felt shame instead of pride in her own unhappy child.

You are such a person, or this letter would not be put into your hands. If you have ever wished (I know you must have done so, sometime) for a chance of rising out of your sad life, and having friends, a quiet home, means of being useful to yourself and others, peace of mind, self-respect, everything you have lost, pray read it attentively, and reflect upon it afterwards. I am going to offer you, not the chance but the *certainty* of all these blessings, if you will exert yourself to deserve them. And do not think that I write to you as if I felt myself very much above you, or wished to hurt

your feelings by reminding you of the situation in which you are placed. God forbid! I mean nothing but kindness to you, and I write as if you were my sister.

Think for a moment, what your present situation is. Think how impossible it is that it ever can be better if you continue to live as you have lived, and how certain it is that it must be worse. You know what the streets are; you know how cruel the companions that you find there, are; you know the vices practised there, and to what wretched consequences they bring you, even while you are young. Shunned by decent people, marked out from all other kinds of women as you walk along, avoided by the very children, hunted by the police, imprisoned, and only set free to be imprisoned over and over again — reading this very letter in a common gaol — you have, already, dismal experience of the truth. But, to grow old in such a way of life, and among such company — to escape an early death from terrible disease, or your own maddened hand, and arrive at old age in such a course — will be an aggravation of every misery that you know now, which words cannot describe. Imagine for yourself the bed on which you, then an object terrible to look at,

will lie down to die. Imagine all the long, long years of shame, want, crime and ruin, that will rise before you. And by that dreadful day, and by the Judgment that will follow it, and by the recollection that you are certain to have then, when it is too late, of the offer that is made to you now, when it is NOT too late, I implore you to think of it, and weigh it well!

There is a lady in this town, who from the windows of her house has seen such as you going past at night, and has felt her heart bleed at the sight. She is what is called a great lady; but she has looked after you with compassion, as being of her own sex and nature; and the thought of such fallen women has troubled her in her bed. She has resolved to open, at her own expense, a place of refuge near London, for a small number of females, who without such help, are lost forever; and to make a HOME for them. In this Home they will be taught all household work that would be useful to them in a home of their own, and enable them to make it comfortable and happy. In this Home, which stands in a pleasant country lane, and where each may have her little flower garden, if she pleases, they will be treated with the greatest kindness; will lead an active, cheerful,

healthy life; will learn many things it is profitable and good to know; and being entirely removed from all who have any knowledge of their past career, will begin life afresh, and be able to win a good name and character.

And because it is not the lady's wish that these young women should be shut out from the world after they have repented and learned to do their duty there, and because it *is* her wish and object that they may be restored to society — a comfort to themselves and it — they will be supplied with every means, when some time shall have elapsed and their conduct shall have fully proved their earnestness and reformation, to go abroad, where in a distant country they may become the faithful wives of honest men, and live and die in peace.

I have been told that those who see you daily in this place, believe that there are virtuous inclinations lingering within you, and that you may be reclaimed. I offer the Home I have described in these few words, to you.

But, consider well before you accept it. As you are to pass from the gate of this Prison to a perfectly new life, where all the means of happiness from which you are now shut out, are opened brightly to you, so remember on the

other hand that you must have the strength to leave behind you all old habits. You must resolve to set a watch upon yourself, and to be firm in your control over yourself, and to restrain yourself; to be gentle, patient, persevering, and good-tempered. Above all things, to be truthful in every word you speak. Do this, and all the rest is easy. But you must solemnly remember that if you enter this Home without such constant resolutions, you will occupy, unworthily and uselessly, the place of some other unhappy girl, now wandering and lost; and that her ruin, no less than your own, will be upon your head, before Almighty God, who knows the secrets of our breasts; and Christ, who died upon the Cross to save us.

In case there should be anything you wish to know, or any question you would like to ask about this Home, you have only to say so, and every information shall be given to you. Whether you accept or reject it, think of it. If you awake in the silence and solitude of the night, think of it then. If any remembrance ever comes into your mind of any time when you were innocent and very different, think of it then. If you should be softened by a moment's recollection of any tenderness or affec-

tion you have ever felt, or that has ever been shown to you, or of any kind word that has ever been spoken to you, think of it then. If ever your poor heart is moved to feel, truly, what you might have been, and what you are, oh think of it then, and consider what you may yet become.

Believe me that I am indeed,

YOUR FRIEND."

It is said that this pamphlet was also given away on the streets to the girls it was intended to reach. But it was perhaps distributed chiefly among imprisoned girls who seemed capable of reform by the prison officials. Doubtless the whole thing was often read and explained by some prison matron. It would seem that Dickens might have cast it along more cheerful lines, with a bit more emphasis on the joys and advantages of the proposed new life, and with a less harrowing picture of the bitter and hopeless aspects of the sad present state.

Also the prospect of going away to some strange "distant country where they may become the faithful wives of honest men and live and die in peace" could not have sounded altogether jolly to a London loving little girl who

only asked to be able to earn a living without bartering herself on the public thoroughfare. But without a "character" even the poorly paid positions were closed to her, and banishment to a distant land was offered as the one hope of respectability.

However, the appeal did its part, and probably for many years after, this gloomy picture of what might be expected in old age frightened many a timid girl into the straight and narrow path.

For several years Dickens gave up a great deal of his time to this Home project. He was ever willing to drop other work and go to the aid of Miss Burdett-Coutts in any task, however difficult, that would assist one of these erring girls to take advantage of that lady's offer of a chance at a new life.

But in spite of all his efforts and the money and time expended, the project proved a failure. If Dickens's wise and practical advice had been followed from the first, the result might have been different, but the methods used were not correct. The inmates became discontented and finally rebellious, and one revolt followed another, which the managers strove in vain to suppress. While several cases were successful,

the number did not seem to justify the time and money required, and the multitude of failures discouraged everyone, but Dickens.

He had felt from the first that the two great tasks were to induce women to go to the Home and then, more difficult still, to keep them there. He knew there was some strange trait in their warped lives which, although they might stifle it for a time, would break out in fits of recklessness and an uncontrollable desire to return to the fate from which they had escaped. In fact he knew so well, from long observation of this class and its whimsical desires, that he proposed and established a rule to the effect that no request to go away should be granted for at least twenty-four hours after it was given, and during that interval the inmate should be persuaded to ponder well on what she was about to do. Such a sudden change of mind was to be regarded as a disease and to be treated with particular gentleness. Every consideration was to be shown these girls; they were to be admitted again and again if they desired, and everything done that love, charity and patience could do to bring about their reformation.

But the venture was well nigh hopeless. How could a Home of this kind, presided over by

people who could not help showing their righteous superiority, succeed? How could the necessary restraints of any Home, even if each girl had her "own little flower garden," compete with the glamorous freedom of the lively Gin Palaces, the excitement, the boon companions, the gaiety, the abandon, the life. No one to tell you what was right and wrong, no one to belittle or patronize you, no one to insist on prayers and the lights out at nine.

In these free and easy gin drinking resorts you were judged by your capacity for fun and frolic, your quick wit, your beauty of face and form, if you had those marketable attractions. You were with your own kind, treated with consideration by the proprietor — and if you got down-hearted, there was always the comforting draught of something in the glass to make one forget and be glad.

"Why, bless you, if it wasn't for the law hounding one, it was not at all a bad life, and as for the finish, Garn! Warn't there Liz who married an honest farmer and was living down in the country, *rich*? Warn't there Polly, who because she could sing, went on the stage and did mighty well? Warn't there Madge who never married, but saved her money and with

the 'elp of a good 'earted bloke 'ad 'er own Pub now? And as for the bloomin' 'College' with its rules and regulations, its lookin' down on sinners and the puttin' on airs by the ones in charge, why life warn't worth livin' at such a place and wot did they offer if you 'appened to graduate with 'igh 'honors? A chance to be transported to Australia or America, and maybe marry a blinkin' Savage!"

In Henry Mayhews' *London Labour and the London Poor*, many personal interviews with Girls of the Street are found, and the following gives a picture of what one of them thought of herself, as well as telling of her habits of life. —

"What are my habits? Why, if I have no letters or visits from friends, I get up about four o'clock, dress ("en dishabille") and dine; after that I may walk about the streets for an hour or two, and pick up anyone I am fortunate enough to meet with, that is if I want money; afterwards I go to the Holborn, dance a little, and if anyone likes me I take him home with me; if not I go to the Haymarket, and wander from one café to another, from Sally's to the Carlton, from Barn's to Sam's and if I find no one there I go, if I feel inclined, to the divans. I like the Grand Turkish best, but you

don't as a rule find good men in any of the divans.

Strange things happen to us sometimes; we may now and then die of consumption; but the other day a lady friend of mine met a gentleman at Sam's, and yesterday morning they were married at St. George's, Hanover Square. The gentleman has lots of money I believe, and he started off with her at once for the Continent. It is very true that this is an unusual case; but we often do marry, and well too; why shouldn't we? We are pretty, we dress well, we can talk and insinuate ourselves into the hearts of men by appealing to their passions and their senses."

So the inmates of the Home must have reasoned, some of them at least, — seeing that rebellion broke out again and again at the many restraints, the many stupid ways of striving to accomplish a difficult task, and finally in sheer desperation the reformers gave up — all but Dickens, who still believed in the idea and persisted in his faith that Emily, Bella, Nancy and Martha could all be saved.

Miss Coutts believing in him, also believed as he did, and as she furnished the money the work went haltingly along, the little lost sisters

came and went, some to reformation and some back to their old haunts. Until finally, at a time when the trials of the superintendent, the matrons and the chaplain were almost greater than they could bear, the Government asked permission to run a railroad through the property and they all in solemn conclave finally convinced Lady Bountiful that the railway was an act of Providence in that it would free them all from the toughest task they had ever attempted; and so she decided to abandon the unhappy "Home" for good and all.

Dickens had tried to do his work anonymously, but in vain. The girls he had interviewed came to know him well, and so to the denizens of the underworld he became a Friend to whom one might turn when the going got too rough. And so it happened, that even after Urania College had flattened out into steel rails and switches, Dickens continued to be the recipient of confidences and confessions, and to be implored now and again to save some wayward sister from the fate he had pictured so graphically in his urgent invitation to enter this promising refuge.

THE STRANGE CASE OF CAROLINE MAYNARD THOMPSON

Dickens had finished the novel "Hard Times" during his second summer in Boulogne in 1854 and had stayed on through the autumn. Before returning to London he received a strange letter that impressed him forcibly. It was written on mourning stationery and he indorsed it with these words: "I received the following letter from a correspondent quite unknown to me, while I was at Boulogne, I think, in the beginning of October." The letter here follows. —

23 Bute Street, Old Brompton,
Oct. 10, '54.

Sir: —

I hope you will forgive the strange appeal that I am about to make to you, but I shall be very grateful if you will read this letter, and may I hope, not throw it aside without notice. I will not take up much of your valuable time but come at once to the point —

My elder sister through a series of misfortunes (the particulars of which I cannot enter into a letter) became acquainted with a gentle-

man and lived with him nine years, but I regret to say not as his wife. She was enabled to keep and educate myself and a sister during that time, I being only ten years of age when first this occurred. I was articled, with a handsome premium,[1] to an architect when seventeen, but I had not been two years so placed before my sister's circumstances changed. Her protector left her and she was plunged in great distress with the chances of a frightful life before her. You can imagine my feelings at this position. My articles were cancelled, which has marred my progress in the profession, and prevented me returning her that kindness which she showered upon me when I was unable to help myself.

My difficulty is this: I cannot wholly support her by my earnings; my desire is to obtain for her some employment or situation, from which she could be independent of me, till I had advanced further in the world. The reason of my writing to you is this: I have no friends who would interest themselves in her behalf; neither has she, for hers is a peculiar position. I have heard much of your goodness to unfortunate

[1] The devoted sister had paid the "handsome premium" for his apprenticeship.

people and your writings have emboldened me to pray for your advice.

There is not a tale, or article of your writing that has not assured me that your disposition is charitable to the misfortunes, and merciful to the faults of others, and that your mind is above the vulgar prejudices of this world. Upon you I have placed my hopes of receiving counsel that will enable me to place my sister, who has been a mother to me, in an honest position. If you will take notice of this letter, I will at a future time enter more fully into the particulars that led to this unhappy state of affairs.

My dear sister's anxious wishes are the same as mine; she must not be judged by her unhappy condition, for I affirm in spite of it, a more virtuous-minded woman never lived. You I am sure would not judge her hardly did you know all particulars of her past life. I have full confidence in your honor, that if you take no notice of this letter, the contents will not go farther, and to prove my confidence, although I have never seen you, I will give you the name of the gentlemen in whose offices I have been. I was articled to F. J. Francis, Esq., Bedford Place, Russell Sq.; and I am now in the office of Henry Clutton, Esq., Charles St., Haymarket. You

will therefore have the opportunity, if you please, of proving what I have written is true.

In conclusion let me pray of you to listen to my appeal. I am without father or friend to assist or advise me, and placed in such a serious position with regard to my sister that I tremble to think of it. For placed as she is she can make no personal application to any one. Do not therefore plunge me in despair by refusing me your advice.

Hoping for a favorable reply,

I remain, Sir,

Yours truly,

FREDERICK MAYNARD

It is very evident that the writer of this letter, although an inexperienced young man, understood how to arrest and hold the reader's attention. Interest is established at once and he loses no time in stating his sister's unfortunate situation. The letter presented with clarity and force a dramatic situation — a situation that Dickens never ignored.

Although he does not mention it, undoubtedly the writer knew of Dickens's connection with "Urania College," and assumed that he was generously disposed toward the young women who were received there. "I have heard

much of your goodness to unfortunate people, . . . your mind is above the vulgar prejudices of the world," and such like sentences show that Dickens had been judiciously selected by the writer as a man to whom he might reasonably look for help.

That he was correct in his judgment is amply proven. Dickens had no sooner arrived home than he wrote the young man asking him to call on Sunday afternoon, October 29. He came; his verbal story increased the interest aroused by his letter, and he left with every reason to believe that help would be immediately extended to his beloved, erring sister; but of course he could not know how pressed for time Dickens was.

After a long absence there was a great deal of accumulated work on his editorial desk in the office of "Household Words" and letters to write to his many friends. Also he was planning to read the "Christmas Carol" several times in December, only a few weeks away, a performance that always required much study and rehearsing. But more than all else, he was in a nervous state and was then, as he was for years later, trying to do too many things.

It having become apparent to young May-

nard and his sister that their cause had been overlooked, two timid notes were later addressed to Dickens. The first, from the brother, ran as follows: —

23 Bute Street, Old Brompton,
Nov. 16, 1854

Dear Sir: —

Not having heard, I fear that I misunderstood you upon leaving your house last Sunday week. You at first said that I was to write to inform you whether my sister was averse to going abroad. Afterwards, I think, you settled that I was *not* to write until I heard from you.

Fearing I may be labouring under a mistake, and deeply anxious about the unhappy situation of my sister, I have taken the liberty of again writing, and enclose a letter from my sister, expressing her anxiety to alter her position even by emigrating, if there are no other means left.

I hope that an opportunity will occur of bringing about that which I so anxiously desire, and relieve my mind of the terrible weight that hangs upon it. I thank you much for the kindness and delicacy you displayed towards me, in the interview I had. I but poorly expressed my

gratitude to you upon that occasion, but believe me, it will ever live in my remembrance.

I remain, dear Sir,
Yours sincerely,
FREDERICK MAYNARD

His sister's letter enclosed with this was fully as well written and disclosed at once that Caroline Maynard Thompson was no ordinary ignorant person. —

23 Bute Street,
Old Brompton

Sir: —

My brother (Frederic Maynard) has acquainted me with the kind interest you expressed in my unhappy affairs, and of the hopelessness of my procuring a situation in England. Although as you may imagine I should prefer remaining in this country, still for my child's sake I should gratefully accept any honorable opportunity of redeeming my position, even to the breaking of all ties that bind me here.

I have no words to thank you for your goodness in listening to my miserable tale, and the hope you have given me of at least one way of escape, and which appears to be the only alternative.

Should it lie in your power to aid me in this matter you will confer a lasting obligation on me.

CAROLINE THOMPSON[1]

November 16, 1854.

Dickens, doubtless a little conscience stricken at having so long neglected the appeal, at once took up the matter. It might perhaps be a case for Miss Coutts's Home. Having in mind no other way of helping the young woman, he immediately dispatched a note to Miss Coutts, enclosing Maynard's first letter, promising also to send her a more complete account the next day, which he did. —

Tavistock House,

Friday Seventeenth November 1854.

My Dear Miss Coutts: —

I send you the astonishing story to which I referred in my note of yesterday. I have regularly paged it, to prevent confusion. You will find it easy to read, I hope, and not half as long as it looks.

And with this note he sent the following ac-

[1] In order to give a name to her illegitimate child she had changed her name from Maynard to Thompson.

count of young Maynard's visit, which until now has eluded the public eye. It was begun on blank leaves of bluish tinted paper, and finished on the back of the foregoing letter from Caroline Thompson. —

"On my return to town, I wrote to the young man representing to him that I had scarcely any hope of helping him in so difficult a matter, but that I was unwilling to seem to slight so peculiar a confidence, and that I would speak with him on the subject, if he would call on the following Sunday at a certain hour. That was Sunday the 29th of October.

At the appointed time, he came. I found him a very quiet, youthful-looking young man of two or three and twenty, with the appearance of being much younger. He was very becomingly and suitably dressed in black, and his manner and his whole account of himself were in perfect accordance with the letter. He cried, at several points of our conversation; but he sat in my room with his back to the light, and always made an effort to hide it, and was evidently relieved when I appeared not to notice it.

To make the least of the wretched story, I will set down here that the person with whom

He had written, only a week or two before, Mrs Wigan of the Olympic Theatre, applying for a situation & had received at the close of an evening, to take out his mistress. There was nothing he would not do, to change his sister's life. But that it had corrupted her — if I would only see her. I should know, he said. I had spoken when five minutes, what a nature she had. [And so he began to sob, and said she was the best — the kindest — the least selfish — I don't know what.]

To try how the shock of a separation they had evidently never thought of, would affect him, I asked him if she had ever thought of living sent abroad — Wher[illegible] — to America — to Australia? He was quite stunned by the idea of parting from her, and asked me, on what pretence did I consider how the natural ties between them must have been strengthened at this time? I said, what I had said so many times to the Home people, and urged him to consider that if (as he had said) she would do anything for her child's sake, she would do that thing on occasion, hard as I admitted it to be. He did not know, he answered. He believed she would do almost anything — but she had never thought of this — she was almost as fond of him as he was of her — he could not bring himself to urge her to such a separation as she had never had in her thoughts. "Ask her," said I. He was going out, and came back, and said "Mr Perkins, I know it would be [illegible] in vain to ask her to leave her child behind her." "No one would propose that," said I. "It was supposed that she had to take it with her."

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To make the least of the wretched story, I will only set down here that the person with whom his sister lived to keep, was engaged in commerce, and was ruined. The sister seems to have done a great deal for him, in the management of his house and accounts; and some of

his relations declared, when he fell into difficulties, that she was the only true friend he had." He was quite reduced & poverty when they parted, and he is far away now and lost sight of altogether. She has known nothing about him these many years.

She had only one course of life open when then, and she has pursued it ever since. She has a child; a little girl of ten years old, to whom she is devoted. Although she is what she is, in the very house to which this brother goes home every night of his life, he has an unbounded respect and love for her, which permits one of the strangest and most bewildering spectacles I ever saw in my remembrance.

She educated her younger sister, who is a Nursery-Governess. The mother (with whom they had a miserable home) is living, and has a small situation in Kensington Workhouse. The young man said he had no consideration for his mother and no love for her. That this elder sister of his had been such a mother to him always, as he thought few boys had; and that the gratitude and affection with which she had inspired him and his younger sister "wasn't to be described." There is no doubt of this being true. I myself had a difficulty in collecting myself to understand their that in the tremendous circumstances of ~~their~~ existence, she has not fallen in this brother's respect.

He represented her as two or three and thirty; as having received no accomplishments; but as having had a good plain education, and being a good housekeeper. He said she loved her child in the most passionate manner imaginable.

When the break-up took place, it was impossible for the young man to continue under his articles, because he (he was then unable to support himself without a Salary, - which, while articled, he was not to receive. His articles were cancelled, therefore (no part of the premium being returned), and he obtained a situation as architectural Draughtsman, which he holds now - at one pound fifteen per week. This class of people have no rise or advance, he says; but are at last, what they are at first. If he could make enough to keep his sister and her child he would be heartily thankful, and they would joyfully maintain home together, and he would ask no help. He had tried all sorts of things in despair.

This is all I know, as yet. I have not replied, nor shall I seen her. I will do both, if you feel interested, and I don't disguise that I hope you do. But I have told the story very coldly, in comparison with the impression it has made upon me. I asked the young man whether there was any one who could speak of this in his besides himself and her? He replied "Dr Lavis of Westminster had once attended her, and interested in her (he felt sure), and would know the truth of what he had told". This Dr Lavis is the medical attendant at Tracey's prison, and I know him very well.

I cannot be right without seeing the girl, of course; but I think that if anything could be done for her, or for her brother, here, it would seem that they had a better chance together than apart.

If you wish to pursue the case, I must first see the doctor - then her. In any case I cannot let it rest; for the position of this boy - his perception of his sister's disgrace, and yet his undiminished admiration of her, and the confidence he has already grown up in, to believe in something good, and never to be mentioned without tenderness and deference - is a romance at once so astonishing and yet so intelligible as I never had the boldness to think of.

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his sister lived so long, was engaged in commerce, and was ruined. The sister seems to have done a great deal for him, in the management of his books and accounts, and some of his relations declared, when he fell into difficulties, 'that she was the only true friend he had.' He was quite reduced to poverty when they parted, and he is far away now and lost sight of altogether. She has known nothing about him these many years.

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him always, as he thought few boys had; and that the gratitude and affection with which she had inspired him and his younger sister, 'couldn't be dissolved.' There is no doubt of this being true. I really had a difficulty in collecting myself to understand that in the tremendous circumstances of their daily existence, she had not fallen in this brother's *respect*.

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When the break-up took place, it was impossible for the young man to continue under his articles, because he was then unable to support himself without a salary — which, while articled, he was not to receive. His articles were cancelled therefore (no part of the premium being returned), and he obtained a situation as architectural draughtsman, which he holds now — at one pound fifteen per week. This class of people have no rise or advance, he says; but are at last what they are at first. If he could make enough to keep his sister and her child he would be heartily thankful, and they would joy-

fully maintain a home together, and he would ask no help. He had tried all sorts of things in despair. He had written only a week or two ago to Mr. Wigan of the Olympic Theatre, applying for a situation to take checks at the door of an evening, to eke out his income. There was nothing he wouldn't do, to change his sister's life. Not that it had corrupted her — if I could only see her, I should know, before I had spoken to her five minutes, what a nature she had. (And so he began to sob, and said she was the best — the kindest — the least selfish — I don't know what).

To try how the shock of a separation they had evidently never thought of, would affect him, I asked him if she had ever thought of being sent abroad — to the Cape — to America — to Australia? He was quite stunned by the idea of parting from her, and asked me, Oh Mr. Dickens did I consider how the natural ties between them must have been strengthened by this time! I said what I have said so many times to the Home people, and I urged him to consider that if (as he had said) she would do anything for her child's sake, she would do that thing on occasion, hard as I admitted it to be. He didn't know, he answered. He believed she

would do almost anything — but she had never thought of this — she was almost as fond of him as he was of her — he couldn't hastily pledge her to such a separation as she had never had in her thought.

'Ask her,' said I. He was going out, and came back, and said, 'Mr. Dickens, I know it would be utterly in vain to ask her to leave her child behind her.'

'No one would propose that,' said I. 'Let us suppose that she was to take it with her.'

This is all I know as yet. I have not replied, nor have I seen her. I will do both, if you feel interested, — and I don't disguise that I hope you do. But I have told the story very coldly in comparison with the impression it has made upon me. I asked the young man whether there was anyone who could speak of his sister besides himself and herself?

He replied, — 'Dr. Lavis of Westminster has attended her, was interested in her (he felt sure) and would know the truth of what he has told.' This Dr. Lavis is the medical attendant at Tracey's prison, and I know him very well.

I cannot be right without seeing the girl, of course; but I think if anything could be done for her, or for her brother, here, it would seem

that they had a better chance together than apart.

If you wish to pursue the case, I would first see the doctor, then her. In any case I cannot let it rest; for the position of this brother — his perception of his sister's disgrace, and yet his undiminished admiration for her, and the confidence he has grown up in, of her being something good, and never to be mentioned without tenderness and deference — is a romance at once so astonishing and yet so intelligible as I never had the boldness to think of."

It must indeed have been an extraordinary case, to have elicited from Dickens the remark that it "presents one of the strangest and most bewildering spectacles I ever saw within my remembrance . . . It is a romance at once so astonishing and yet so intelligible as I never had the boldness to think of."

Today, of course, with so many opportunities open to girls, Caroline would have found her business training useful and could have stepped into a paying position where her former associations would not have been questioned, or if known, considering her beauty and intelligence, they would have been disregarded by her employers. So far have we progressed in tolerance

and common sense; but in 1854 she was simply the unfortunate "mistress" of a bankrupt, and business men had no place for such women in their counting houses.

But just around the corner were the glittering gin-palaces — magnificent in their crystal decorations, warm and inviting; and in these places Caroline was made welcome and soon found that if she took up the life of the girl of the streets, she could make enough money to care for the needs of brother, sister and mother.

The step was a short one from mistress to prostitute, and Caroline took it. At night she put aside the quiet motherly rôle, the modest garb of the day, and dressing in the trappings of her night life, she fared forth to earn the family income. Out of this life a girl baby was born to her and so there was another mouth to feed; but somehow, some way, from the earnings of her miserable calling she kept them all alive and well at home, and willingly sacrificed herself to do it. By reason of her strength of character she was able to keep separate and distinct the two lives she thus lived — was able to retain the love and respect of her sister and brother, although they were forced to see her mode of living — was able to retain a sweet

A NIGHT HOUSE.—KATE HAMILTON'S.

and womanly character and devote herself to the welfare of her wards.

The young sister had been educated, the young brother had been apprenticed to a useful trade, and even the mother was rehabilitated and given some sort of work. The house was kept cheerful and habitable, and grim despair and want disappeared for a time.

And thus she continued — perhaps not so far different from other girls of that kind, but because her life touched that of Charles Dickens it has endured, an absorbing story of a bit of human driftwood caught and held in a hitherto unknown chapter of his life history.

Only a novelist could make so much out of such a situation, and Dickens's enthusiasm over the story led him to overlook what would seem to have been a very simple solution of the matter, particularly for one possessed of the means of Miss Coutts. The devoted brother in order to make a home for this sister and to restore her to respectability, only required a position where he could earn money enough to support the little family. But Dickens seems not to have been concerned in finding the brother a better job; there was nothing interesting about that; he was continually being asked to do that

sort of thing, and he had several sons he was trying to place in good positions. He preferred to get from Caroline's own lips the story of her predicament. That was drama, — and Dickens loved drama in all its aspects.

It seems amazing that in a city the size of London, even in 1854, a clean-cut virtuous looking girl could be so marked by immorality that she must needs fly the country to live decently. Yet that was the only alternative Dickens offered in his talk with the brother. No wonder the young man was, as Dickens remarked, "quite stunned." This deportation idea must have been an obsession with Dickens; he had used it as one of the enticements in his pamphlet to wayward girls.

Miss Coutts was impressed by Dickens's eloquent appeal in behalf of Caroline, and the accompanying documents prove that she considered the case deserving enough to ask him to investigate it further. He thereupon wrote to Doctor Lavis, of Westminster, and received a report which he enclosed with the following letter to her. —

Tavistock House,
Monday Night Eleventh December, 1854.

My dear Miss Coutts: —

I have been asked to give you the enclosed letter from Birmingham. I replied that I would do that much, accompanying it with no other remark than that I knew the Institution to be the best in England, and of national importance.

I have today seen Mrs. Thompson, the sister of the young man whose letters I sent to you, and in reference to whom I received the enclosed report from Doctor Lavis. The kind of life she leads is far from being as bad as you might suppose, and to prevent its being worse than it is, she has parted with everything in the way of personal ornament. She would willingly go to the Cape, and I have the strongest belief that she would do well. I plainly see, and therefore feel bound to mention, that her child is the one great occasion of her desiring to retrieve the past.

She is rather small and young-looking, but pretty, and gentle, and has a very good head. Her manner was exceedingly natural to the circumstances in which I saw her, and she greatly strengthened my previous disposition to be in-

terested in her. I feel confident that there can never have been much evil in her, apart from the early circumstances that directed her steps the wrong way.

She could not be placed on a level with our Shepherd's Bush girls. Her manner, character, and experience, are altogether different.

It is a very remarkable case. I very much wish you would see her, and judge for yourself of its peculiarity. There is nothing about her from which you could suppose she had come to this. You might see her and her brother a thousand times — you might meet them in the street, every day in the year — and only notice them as brother and sister who were no doubt living together and taking care of one another. I cannot get the picture of her out of my head. I particularly wish that you could see her and speak to her.

Supposing she were sent abroad, and her child were to die there soon, I am doubtful whether she would not come back — *unless* she had found an opening for her brother and he had gone out to her.

Perhaps you will tell me on Wednesday, when I can speak to you on this case, and also about Charley [Dickens's son] — in reference

to whom I should like to show you a letter I have from Birmingham.

The "Poor Travellers" have not yet emerged from the steam engine. As soon as they appear, they shall wait on you. I hope you will like my little story, as the First of them. It has made such an impression on the staff, that I think there must be something in it!

Ever, dear Miss Coutts,
Most faithfully yours,
C. D.

It will be seen that Dickens made every effort to convince Miss Coutts that the young woman was worthy, and that a little direct aid would be an act of real mercy. He could easily overlook all the sins she had committed — he who had created Nancy Sikes, Little Emily and Martha could read the case of Caroline Maynard Thompson and see that although anxious to reform, she could not, unaided, escape from that sort of life.

Strange to say — and it must have puzzled the girl not a little — in Dickens's mind there still appeared to be no other alternative but to leave England. She could of course have been sent to some remote part of the country where,

not being obliged to sell herself for their daily bread, she could have lived with her child, without anyone suspecting her past. At all events she proved her sincerity by her willingness to accept whatever option they might offer.

But Miss Coutts moved with great deliberation; she evidently took the matter under advisement and nothing came of it for nearly a month. Dickens was again swept away into his ocean of work. In addition to his literary tasks he began in January 1855 to prepare for another amateur play to be given in his home in which all his children and several of his friends were to take part, and as usual he attended to every detail. He was planning a vacation in Paris with his friend Wilkie Collins and no one knows how many other strenuous undertakings were in his mind.

Caroline was beginning to feel herself lost sight of once more; it was hard to go on living the same old life when her hopes had been aroused for a deliverance from such a noxious vocation, so she very timidly wrote this note, praying that it might recall her once more to his mind. —

23 Bute Street, Old Brompton
Monday

Dear Sir: —

May I hope your kindness will pardon this intrusion, but as you may imagine, I am anxious to know if your endeavors for me have been attended with success.

I cannot express the deep gratitude I feel for the kind sympathy and interest you have shown in my affairs.

Will you tell me if there is a possibility of my being able to leave England soon, as indeed I am very anxious to do.

Yours very gratefully,
CAROLINE THOMPSON

This note bears the following inscription in Dickens's handwriting: —

"Saturday, Shepherd's Bush 1/2 past 11
Mrs. Thompson
Received Tuesday, 9th January 1855"

Again he took up her cause; he at once saw Miss Coutts and arranged for her to give Caroline an interview at the Shepherd's Bush Home. Then he wrote another letter to Caroline, which

she received on Wednesday, giving her news of this appointment. Possibly his note was a trifle brusque. It is known that owing to domestic infelicities he was in a very nervous and excitable state at this period of his life. Anyhow, Caroline's reply has a touch of fear in it, as if she may have felt that he was offended. —

23 Bute Street, Old Brompton
Thursday

Sir: —

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter and to thank you for your endeavors to interest Miss Coutts in my story, and obtaining me an interview with her.

I look forward with hopes that Saturday may be the commencement of a new and happier life, and trust that my future conduct may prove to you and that lady that your goodness has not been shewn to an unworthy person.

You will pardon me I trust for writing my last letter; it was caused by no thought of your having lost sight of my case, but from a deep anxiety to know my future fate. You will I am sure understand this feeling and excuse my apparent impatience.

I mention this, fearing I might have done wrong in writing.

Believe me I remain
Yours very gratefully,
CAROLINE THOMPSON

Impressed with her communication, Dickens wrote to Miss Coutts on Friday, chiefly about his son Charles, but with a closing paragraph about Caroline. —

Tavistock House,
Friday, 12th January 1855.

My Dear Miss Coutts: —

On Wednesday evening, Mr. Ryland of Birmingham came here and we had a long and careful discussion as to Charley. He had made extensive enquiries in his town, and had no doubt of the possibility of placing Charley in Scholefield's house — Scholefield being one of the present members for Birmingham, and a very agreeable and worthy man, whom I know.

But there appeared to be no doubt (and Mr. Ryland himself laid stress upon this, as another result of his enquiries), that the Birmingham business is *not* the business of a general merchant — is exceptional and peculiar — and be-

longs to that particular place; the merchants who send Birmingham goods all over the world, living elsewhere, and trading on a large scale in all manner of other merchandise too. Now, what Charley most wants to acquire, is a knowledge of general business — of home and foreign markets — and of home and foreign men. Whereas at Birmingham he would only gain a knowledge of Birmingham business, Birmingham ways, and Birmingham men. Mr. Wills, who has a good plain head in all such matters, assisted at the council, and we all three came to the conclusion that it would be best to begin with a London house, and then (supposing no opening should present itself in the Turkey direction you spoke of — though I hope for such a thing), to give him a year or so in Liverpool as an active port where a vast deal of business is done. Wills was rather for beginning with Liverpool; but Mr. Ryland was strong on two points: first, on the advantage of beginning in London where the tone of commerce is higher and more responsible; secondly, on the great advantage of a youth's being at home, in the outset of his career.

Wills has to go to Liverpool on another business next Monday, and I have begged him to

see some people we know there, and take their opinion also.

I think I could address myself to no first-rate London merchant's house at so great an advantage as through some introduction of yours. Will you kindly think of it? I am very anxious not to lose time. I particularly wish to see Charley actually in the path he is to follow — though I will take care that he is not idle in the meantime. Indeed he wishes to be employed and is glad of my making employment for him.

I have appointed Mrs. Thompson (as we agreed) to be at Shepherd's Bush at half past eleven tomorrow. She wrote a very good letter in reply — very grateful and I cannot but think very honest.

Ever, dear Miss Coutts,
Most faithfully yours,
CHARLES DICKENS

Miss Coutts probably kept the appointment, but we have no record of the impression Caroline made on her. At any rate no immediate action was taken. There is a strong probability that she doubted Dickens's judgment; that she felt he was carried away by the "romance" he saw in the situation — for instead of relying

on his report, reinforced by that of Doctor Lavis, she delegated another individual, a Mr. Tennant, to make a separate investigation. And he, not daring to trust his own judgment in what he seems to have regarded a ponderous matter, first consulted Caroline's neighbors, then went into council with his own neighbor Mr. Tracey, the prison official.

After Dickens had explicitly set forth the young woman's case, dwelling with great emphasis and pathos upon its merit and its urgency, we now have Miss Coutts, Doctor Lavis, Mr. Tennant and Mr. Tracey all looking up past history, rather than concurrent facts, and passing judgment on the unhappy little mother before any relief can be administered. If this sort of imbecilic "red tape" was resorted to in Miss Coutts's Home for Fallen Women, the inmates must have felt that the annoyances of inquisition and supervision were entirely disproportionate to the benefits they received. Maybe that's one reason why it failed.

The next letter reads almost like a page from one of Dickens's own novels; indeed it sounds as if it might have emanated from the worthy and high-minded Mr. Pecksniff himself. We do not know who Mr. W. Tennant was, but ap-

parently he was a very prudent, and presumably a very scrupulous gentleman who had no wayward daughters of his own. No doubt he was connected in some way with the Shepherd's Bush Home.

St. Stephen's Westminster
3 Feb., 1855.

My dear Madam: —

I have called on the person referred to in the enclosed letters, at Brompton, and made several enquiries the result of which I will endeavor to state. The case presents many difficulties — one must feel compassion for this person in her present unhappy condition and I am disposed to believe her assurances of a desire to amend and lead a virtuous life; but if in your kindness you feel disposed to extend to her a helping hand, the difficulty is to know how this may be effectually and properly done. That it is a case for help seems certain — but how that help shall be bestowed requires consideration.

I will submit to you a few facts in their order.

1. — This is a Westminster person. I know the house where she was born and bred. I have been able to converse with neighbors who have lived in an adjoining house for more than

twenty years. Her father was a head-workman in Broadwood's Piano Factory and withal a drunken brute from whose word and example his children could learn nothing good. On his death, the mother and two daughters kept a school for girls, for a little while, then came these evil communications which are described in the letters and which commenced about twelve years ago.

2. — This person now lives in a small rented house, is well-dressed and by no means (seemingly) in destitute circumstances. She is handsome — states herself to be thirty-five years old and is the mother of a child aged two years. It is my belief, as I have stated, that she sincerely desires to be rescued from a life of sin. But her manner of life, as yet is not reputable. Her brother's earnings are 25/" per week.

3. — After living for so many years in shameful luxury (tho' at present poorer than she has ever yet been) I consider that she is quite unfit to maintain herself by needlework, or any laborious employment, and indeed she so acknowledged to me.

4. — She is willing to emigrate; but is a person of such precedents and habits fit to encounter the hardships of the new world? Also her

mother is still alive and occupying a post in the Kensington Workhouse (as head nurse in the Infirmary). Her brother and a sister (a milliner alas! of damaged reputation) are also residing in London, and she has the incumbrance of a little child.

I have not been able to consult with Mr. Dickens, but I have taken council with my neighbour Mr. Tracey. It is our opinion that an endeavor might be made to obtain some situation which she might be capable of holding and which might be proposed to her as a means of separating her from *all* her present associates, her house, etc. That so she may commence afresh with better hopes and ways, and if such a situation can be found some help from you in establishing her in it would be most useful. We intend to see whether her mother cannot find a house, however humble, for this daughter, and her willingness to acquiesce with any arrangements, however poor and trying, will be a test of sincerity. I will write, with your permission, again to you about this matter,

and am, dear madam,

Yours faithfully,

W. TENNANT

Just why this "person" — whom he so denominates five times in this letter — needed to be further investigated is not as obvious to the reader as it appears to have been to Mr. Tennant. That judicial gentleman was not content to confine his autopsy on the young woman's character to a conversation with her alone, as Dickens did; he talked with the next door neighbors, charitable souls, no doubt, who had lived at their post of observation for "more than twenty years," and from this fruitful source he gained the information that Caroline was the daughter of a "drunken brute," and that her "evil communications had commenced about twelve years ago;" thus giving Miss Coutts the impression that she was, inherently and purposefully a time-hardened offender. He might in all fairness have qualified this with the truth, that nine of those twelve years had been devoted to keeping house for the man she loved, trusted and helped; and that he deserted her in the midst of financial disaster. If Mr. Tennant learned anything good about her he carefully concealed it.

The fact that Caroline was intelligent, sweet, gentle and ladylike, as Dickens had reported her to be, and was the devoted self-sacrificing

mother of a babe who had not even the protection of a father's name, was not enough to satisfy this rigid investigator, who was far more interested in scenting out antecendent scandal than he was in getting at and reporting the wholesome truth. The fate of the unfortunate little child did not seem to bother him in the least.

The adoring brother could excuse his erring sister, the widowed mother could doubtless find extenuating reasons for her elder daughter's downfall; even the younger daughter (who, by the way, the inquisitive Mr. Tennant declared was "a milliner, alas of damaged reputation"), might also overlook Caroline's mode of earning a living; but not so with the neighbors — and Mr. Tennant. His discovery, through hearsay, that the young lady sister, then residing in London, was a milliner of bad reputation was as gratuitous as it probably was false, for the brother (whose truthfulness we have no reason to doubt) had told Dickens that she was a nursery-governess. But Mr. Tennant, willing to believe the worst, accepted this malicious slander as gospel truth, and stated it, not as a rumor but a fact, without any equivocation; also without any good reason except that it

seemed to lend color to his distorted idea that Caroline was a bad character.

Mr. Tennant also found that the case presented "many difficulties," and warned Miss Coutts that if help were bestowed it must be done with "consideration." It required a person of just about his perspicuity to caution a woman with millions at her disposal how *difficult* it would be for her to render immediate aid to one of her fallen sisters who had to walk the streets those winter nights, not because she was instinctively so inclined, but because it was her sole means of providing food and shelter for her loved ones.

While Mr. Tennant's report lacked the sympathy and urgency of Dickens's plea, Miss Coutts was not totally dissuaded by it. But she waited until he should *again* call on this "Westminster person" before taking any action.

In the course of nine days' time the second report arrived; it yielded what Mr. Tennant apparently considered a marvellous discovery.

St. Stephen's Westminster
16 February 1855

My dear Madam: —

I have lately visited, by your desire, Caroline

Thompson in Bute Street, Brompton. I wish to mention that this unhappy person yesterday lost her mother by sudden death at her place of occupation, Kensington Workhouse. Both the daughters were present at the decease of their parent and behaved with great feeling and the best propriety. I am altogether of opinion that Caroline Thompson sincerely desires to be rescued from her degraded condition, which without a helping hand, she never may be able to abandon; and the mother's decease seems to render her more certainly an object for extraneous help.

Perhaps on your return to town you will kindly hold a consultation with Mr. Dickens which may exhibit some mode of assisting her properly and effectually.

I am truly sorry to hear through Mr. Dyer that there is sickness in your family. The weather today in London is particularly severe.

Believe me, dear madam,
Yours faithfully,
W. TENNANT

To Miss Coutts.

He mentions feelingly that "this unhappy person lost her mother by sudden death" and

the knowledge that both she and her sister "behaved with great feeling and the best propriety" at the death-bed seems to have been a revelation to him. It would be interesting to know just what else he expected of them.

Anyway, the nine days of careful incubation brought forth a re-birth of his opinion that Caroline "sincerely desires" to be rescued from her "degraded condition." This was a rather safe conclusion, seeing it was the one thing that she, with the aid of Dickens and Dr. Lavis, had for three months been struggling and imploring to accomplish. But although Mr. Tennant was ultimately convinced, he refrained from offering any solution — perhaps because the *difficulties* were too baffling.

He concluded his report with a colorful observation on the severity of the London weather. Doubtless it was particularly severe and desolate for poor unfortunate girls of the street who desirous of mending their ways, must beg for help, then wait for months while their reputations were undergoing the process of scandal-hunting investigation, to determine if they were worth what it might cost to save them.

But still further delay was in store for Caroline, because on February 15, 1855, the day

before Mr. Tennant wrote this second report on her case, Dickens was in Paris, at the Hotel Meurice, where he was "locked up within," writing his second long and affectionate letter to his boyhood sweetheart, Maria Beadnell Winter, who had suddenly and unexpectedly appeared in his life, and at once claimed a great deal of his time and thought.

It is safe to assume that if Mr. Tennant had been sent to investigate *that* "romance" his report would have made a thrilling chapter for Mr. C. E. Bechofer Roberts's book entitled "This Side Idolatry."

Miss Coutts again took Caroline's case under advisement and on Dickens's return to London, she consulted him; after which she decided to render aid, but not in the way Dickens had first suggested. Instead of sending her abroad they finally decided to establish her in what we would now call a "lodging house" where she might make an honest living and provide a home for her child and her brother. It was seemingly a very sensible arrangement; but when after a time the plan was to be put in operation, Miss Coutts had forgotten Caroline's address, as the next letter shows. It also shows that "Urania College" was still in existence and

Dickens was still aiding Miss Coutts as best he could in the details of its conduct.

Tavistock House
Thursday Eighth March 1855.

My dear Miss Coutts: —

The address of Mrs. Thompson is 23 Bute Street, Old Brompton.

After I left you yesterday, I went into the city and saw the secretary of that Protective Institution — in a sort of china-closet at the back of a first floor in the Poultry.

They clearly want to use the case as an advertising Puff of their establishment, and don't desire to part with it — evidently looking upon the girl [1] as so much capital. After a short conversation, in which the secretary enunciated a great deal of perilous nonsense (in reference to which I politely suggested to him afar off, that he knew nothing of what he was talking about), I left the matter thus: that if they ever desired to make application for the girl's admission into your Home, it would be considered, but that the case must even then stand upon its own merits

[1] It is not clear who "the girl" was, but it could scarcely have been Caroline Thompson, seeing that arrangements had already been made for setting her up in a lodging house.

and suitability to your institution. I would not at any time give them money; — I fear a good deal of trading cant prevails in the concern.

The price of the drying machine will be eighteen guineas. I have told Mr. Jeakes it must be ready to go with the drying closet, or you won't have it. I am now pressing upon him the necessity of expediting the shipment.

I think I have just got the best ghost story (sent by a lady for Household Words) that ever was written, and with an idea in it remarkably new. My hand is stayed for the moment, however, by an apprehension that the lady cannot have written it. It is so very clever, that I think (though I never saw or heard of it), it must have been written by some wild Frenchman — and I am trying to find out.

Ever, dear Miss Coutts,

Most faithfully yours,

C. D.

Finally two days later, Caroline was told that she was to be given material assistance and now comes the solemn admonition, even from Dickens himself, that she must not fail to appreciate this great blessing. Five months of "investigation" had passed, during which time she had to support the little family in her usual way.

This next letter approaches more nearly to the Pecksniffian flavor than anything from Dickens's pen outside of *Martin Chuzzlewit* itself.

Tavistock House
Saturday Tenth March 1855.

My dear Miss Coutts: —

I wrote yesterday (necessarily therefore before I received your note) to the brother. I told him all that you had before you in reference to the sister, and I said "let me now particularly impress upon your sister, through you, that on her thorough earnestness, patience, and perseverance, at this point in her life, her own future and that of her child undoubtedly depend." I added that I would see her, or him, or both, any Sunday at half past one. I will take such opportunity of repeating the caution. I stated the case, however, in the plainest and

strongest manner that I could possibly employ; and I did so in writing, to the end that it might make a more enduring effect, as being always there upon the paper.

Ever, dear Miss Coutts,

Most faithfully yours,

C. D.

I enclose a note received this morning from Miss Martineau.

But even after all this good advice the delays continued, and the young woman was forced to write again begging to know when she might hope to give up her present mode of life. Dickens simply enclosed her note with a line to Miss Coutts.

Action was still further delayed, and he again wrote to Miss Coutts, as appears in the next letter. He must have felt they had incurred some moral responsibility in offering Caroline so much encouragement, and something ought to be done immediately, if at all.

Seventeenth March 1855.
Tavistock House

My Dear Miss Coutts: —

Mrs. Thompson and her brother will no doubt be with me tomorrow morning. What am I to do? I only want to know. I quite agree with you that it is immensely difficult — and yet her position seems plainly to be a perplexed and complicated one.

Charley and I dine with Mr. Bates on Sunday, to confer. Mr. Bates writes me that he can place him in a broker's house, but would like to talk to him first, that he may be sure — or as sure as he can be — that he is not *mis*-placing him. You have not seen your Turkish friend?

Perhaps you may like to read the great ghost story before it comes out. I send you my proof therefore. You have only to put it in the fire. All my corrections are made upon a duplicate, and I don't want it again.

Charley is immensely excited by the opening prospect, and is, I really believe, very earnest to begin. I have lately added to my other little occupations, a determined endeavor to reform a misdoing institution. If you had seen Sir Robert Inglis in the chair (where he was very

just and good natured), beleagured by your servant for two hours and a half, I know you would have been amazed for a week.

I likewise,

My dear Miss Coutts,

Ever most faithfully yours,

C. D.

The opening paragraph of the foregoing contains a queer, cloudy sort of logic. After agreeing that the case is "immensely difficult," Dickens adds, "and yet her position seems plainly to be a perplexed and complicated one." That would seem naturally to follow his conclusion without the "and yet." Doubtless Mr. Tennant had already convinced Miss Coutts on that point; but viewing matters at this distance, in the light of all the correspondence, the perplexities seem to have been largely imaginary, and everyone made a mountainous affair out of a perfectly simple case. With unlimited means and great influence, coupled with a real desire to help the girl, it would have been easy enough to rent a little home, put her in it and provide a small monthly allowance. Her devotion to her little girl and the brother would certainly have kept her off the streets, unless driven there by necessity.

However the great difficulties appear to have been surmounted, for Caroline was set up in the lodging house business in a new neighborhood, far from her old home, and her old associations knew her no more. There is nothing among the letters that were saved by Miss Coutts to show whether or not any attention was paid to her during the year that followed. Probably she was "investigated" occasionally to see if she were keeping faith with her benefactors. And quite likely she justified their trust in her.

We have no knowledge as to how much the generous Miss Coutts did for Caroline, aside from starting her in the lodging house, but seeing from the following letter that this enterprise soon failed, we are not led to suppose that the wealthy baroness strained her purse in helping the little mother, apart from possibly giving her some necessary furniture.

Tavistock House
Tuesday Night Twentieth May 1856.

My dear Miss Coutts:—

Mrs. Thompson has written me a letter, and I have seen her since its receipt. The lodging-letting does not succeed sufficiently well to be pursued. In June the notice she has given to

quit her house, will expire. She will then by the sale of her furniture and so forth, have from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds. With this sum, she desires nothing more than to emigrate to Canada, along with her child, if she can see any reasonably hopeful prospect of getting employment — attendant on children, companion, manager, housekeeper, superintendent, any honest thing. She writes very well, is a good plain accountant, and generally neat and handy. Does any means of helping her occur to you? I am trying among Canada Railway people, but I fear uselessly, as their schemes are in a bad way. I should be very glad to hear from you on this, at your leisure.

You will have fine weather for the new house, I hope, and will enjoy it. With kind regards to Mrs. Brown,

Ever, dear Miss Coutts,

Most faithfully yours,

C. D.

The ultimate fate of this interesting character is unknown, but seeing that Dickens had not slackened his vigilance it is safe to assume that she was looked after in some way. Whatever her destiny may have been, she will always

have this distinction: her pitiable plight, her inherent sweetness of character, her sincerity, her motherly and sisterly devotion all touched the great heart of Charles Dickens; and his hosts of admirers will be glad to read these indubitable proofs of his humanitarianism.

Why was Charles Dickens so interested in this particular class? Primarily, because of his charity toward the unfortunate. But there were many other deserving classes. He might have taken an interest in aged and indigent men and women, in the ever-present army of unemployed, in foundlings, in dozens of other philanthropies.

He did interest himself in all the needy and unfortunate, and by writing about them as he did, he changed entirely, within the scope of his writing career, the whole attitude of the rich toward the poor.

All this may be granted and still we find his greater interest to have been in fallen women. Of course the underworld always fascinated him. He loved to take midnight trips into the subterranean haunts of vice and depravity, and he got a real thrill in the business of interviewing the soiled flowers he found there, in those

sinks of iniquity, and in using their stories for dramatic relief in his novels.

It is known that he took a deep interest in many things that his official biographer chose to minimize or conceal; therefore his long industrious work at "Urania College" was barely mentioned. And so after all this time these yellowing bits of paper have come to light, — bearing witness to this fact; also that there was then, as there is now, no subject more absorbing to a large percentage of humanity than "the woman with a past."

Dickens's work for the Home for Fallen Women — his message to wayward girls, and the correspondence regarding Caroline Maynard Thompson all reveal a new and absorbing side of the great novelist's character and give added proof that he endeavored always to turn wretchedness into happiness.

"EXPOSING DICKENS"

In the general movement now in full cry in this year of 1929, to remove by force the halo that Dickens has worn for so many years, books and articles in the press have appeared in which the writers take keen delight in showing that in spite of the high moral tone of all his stories, he was full of faults, was fond of pretty young actresses, was in love with his sister-in-law, was unfaithful to his long suffering wife and was prone to several forms of dissipation.

These muck-raking efforts, now a popular form of biography, have been hailed with delight by cynics, morons and "moderns," so that the Dickensian is often greeted with the triumphant yawp: "What do you think of your Dickens *now*!"

There is just enough truth in all this to prove, what Dickens students have always known, that he was intensely *human.*

He did love the society of talented theatrical people, because he was deeply enamored of the stage; he was frankly and openly devoted to his sister-in-law Georgina, and so were all his children, to whom she unselfishly devoted her life.

He separated from his wife, due to a continual clash of temperament which finally became unbearable to both. He loved to write about the joys of the flowing bowl, and he could mix a marvellous punch, though he was one of the most abstemious of men.

His own life is a more dramatic tale than any of his novels, but in it there is nothing of which he or his friends need ever be ashamed.

His friends in America were in some instances very close to him and many have left in their diaries and letters vivid impressions of his character and his everyday life. Nothing but praise, amounting almost to idolatry, can be found in all these records. He went through all his activities very much as he took his daily walks. On these hikes, people who accompanied him found themselves hard put to keep up. The same was true of everything he did; he was always doing what he chose to do with superhuman vigor. It burned him out in his prime, but he could work no other way.

So it was with the Home for Fallen Women. Once his interest was aroused, his one thought was to make it a great success. He selected the house, wrote the appealing circular, framed the rules, examined the candidates; he did every-

thing just as he worked and slaved when he was preparing an amateur theatrical performance.

In the quality of his sympathy, in the depth of his love for humanity, in the extent of his influence for good, he stands so high above any of his detractors that those who know him best can afford to smile at the puny efforts made to defame his memory.

Barrett 14-9
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